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Full, Fast & Freezing: River Dangers Remain High

SAN FRANCISCO- Pacific Gas and Electric Company and the California Department of Boating and Waterways are teaming up to remind river users that northern rivers continue to experience high water flows and cold temperatures.

A wetter than normal winter, combined with this spring's relatively cool weather and late season snowfall, have delayed snow melt. Now that warm weather has arrived, the accelerated snow melt is delivering much higher river runoff than in previous years. River flows south of the Sierra's Mokelumne River are predicted to be the largest since 1998, and many reservoirs are expected to fill completely and have excess water spilling through dams' flood channels, as designed. Some of the largest spills are expected to take place below seasonal reservoirs on the Stanislaus, San Joaquin and North Fork Kings rivers. Additionally, side streams that are usually dry will experience high flow rates.

"Water temperatures are likely to be colder at a given location than what recreationists have experienced in the past," says Randy Livingston, senior director of PG&E's hydroelectric system. "River users need to be cautious of water temperatures and potential water hazards when recreating in and around mountain streams and reservoirs."

"Strong currents can capsize vessels, throw people overboard, shift weight creating unsafe balance and cause equipment to fail," said Ray Tsuneyoshi, director of the Department of Boating and Waterways. "When boating on northern rivers this summer, watch out for floating debris and branches and other submerged snag hazards near banks."

Some additional safety tips are:

Know the Water

- Cold water can cause hyperventilation contributing to fatigue. When combined with swift water, even the strongest swimmers are easily overwhelmed.
- Cold water can stimulate the "gasp reflex" causing an involuntary inhalation of air or water.

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- The “gag reflex,” another result of cold water immersion, prevents air or water from passing in to the lungs causing asphyxiation.
- Sudden cold water immersion can trigger cardiac arrest.
- Cold water entering the ear canal can cause vertigo and disorientation. This may confuse the swimmer causing the victim to swim deeper into the water or into the propeller.

Know your limits

- Swimming in open water is more difficult than in a swimming pool – people tire more quickly and can get into trouble.
- Cold water causes impairment leading to fatalities. Cold water reduces body heat 25-30 times faster than air does at the same temperature.
- Drinking alcohol can accelerate the effects of hypothermia.

Prepare for the worst

- If you choose to go to the river alone, tell someone where you are going and when you’ll be back, and check in with them when you’re home safe and sound.
- Plan ahead; wear a life jacket before entering the water.

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For more information about Pacific Gas and Electric Company, please visit our web site

www.pge.com

For more information about the California Department of Boating and Waterways, please

visit their web site www.dbw.ca.gov